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SUBJECT: MORALES MAINTAINS COMMANDING LEAD

REF: LA PAZ 1425

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires John Creamer for reasons 1.4 (b, d)

¶11. (C) Summary: With one month left before the December 6 national elections, President Morales and his ruling Movement Toward Socialism party (MAS) remain poised to retain the presidency and take control over both houses of the Plurinational Assembly (Congress). Public and private polling indicate that primary opposition challenger Manfred Reyes Villa remains unlikely to present a challenge to Morales, who should win easily in the first round of voting. The MAS is primed to keep control of the House of Deputies and to wrest control of the Senate from the opposition by a significant margin. Morales has increased his public calls for a two-thirds majority in both the House of Deputies and the Senate, and it would take a major shift in current voting trends to deny the MAS this goal. End summary.

Morales Outpacing Reyes Villa

¶12. (U) Recent polling, both public and private, show President Morales retaining his lead over the two main opposition challengers, Manfred Reyes Villa and Samuel Doria Medina. A publicly-released Ipsos Apoyo poll shows Morales national lead shrinking slightly from September to October, from 54 to 52 percent, while both Reyes Villa and Doria Medina have moved up, from 20 to 21 percent and 11 to 13 percent, respectively. With just one month to go before elections, however, Reyes Villa would need to effect an extremely unlikely 22 point swing to force a second round runoff with Morales.

¶13. (C) Private nationwide polling done by both Stanley Greenberg's and Dick Morris' firms agree that Morales has a commanding lead. The October 27 Greenberg poll indicates Morales leading Reyes Villa 56 to 26 percent. Further, the poll shows satisfaction with the country's overall direction has increased to 43 percent, up from 28 percent less than six months ago, and Morales' favorability rating at 50 percent (up five points in two months). While the Greenberg poll shows Reyes Villa's image has improved slightly, it is up to only 23 percent, and he carries a 56 percent unfavorable rating. (Doria Medina's unfavorability rating is similarly high, at 55 percent.)

¶4. (C) Even the Dick Morris poll, commissioned by a regional opposition group partial to Reyes Villa, shows Morales at 47 percent and Reyes Villa at 28 percent. Despite this lead, Morris calls the election "a race we can win," recommending a negative campaign that attacks Morales on crime, narcotrafficking, police corruption, and Morales' relationship with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. The Greenberg poll finds many of the same weaknesses, but concludes that even these weaknesses would be difficult to capitalize on. Both agree that third-place challenger Doria Medina's job-creation strategy will find little purchase, as 54 percent of the country feels their economic situation has improved over the last four years and 61 percent believe job creation to be one of Morales' major achievements (according to the Greenberg poll).

MAS Taking the Fight into Opposition Strongholds

¶5. (U) While the opposition casts about for a winning strategy, Morales and the MAS are making inroads in opposition territory. The MAS has announced alliances with former members of Santa Cruz's radical (and sometimes violent) Cruceno Youth Union, former allies of Santa Cruz Prefect Ruben Costas, and some Santa Cruz business leaders. Morales has also been lauded for reaching out to the middle class through his nomination of Ana Maria Campero, a well-respected former national Ombudsman, for Senator of La Paz department. Polls do not yet show a MAS gain in Santa Cruz and other opposition departments related to this effort, but local media have reported heavily on this development in recent days.

Comment

¶6. (C) Despite whatever slim hopes the Reyes Villa campaign may still hold, it would take an unprecedented turn of events to force a second round against President Morales, much less an outright win. Reyes Villa's national campaign manager resigned recently, citing corruption, inefficiency, and a lack of a coherent strategy. Nevertheless, Reyes Villa appears to have consolidated his support in Santa Cruz and his other core constituencies and could yet hold off a two-thirds MAS majority. End comment.

CREAMER